

Benefits of Committees to the Institution

Committee hearings play a critical role in enabling citizen participation in the legislative process in Montana. Citizens may also participate by communicating with legislators about specific pieces of legislation through letters, electronic mail, or phone messages.

Committees are the only official time to hear directly from citizens favoring or opposing a bill. Some travel hundreds of miles to comment. Committees have time to get into the nuts and bolts of public policy in a way that the full body can't. It is important to stress that committees are your time to be face to face with the public and your constituents. Committees are often where the public gets its perception (good or bad) of the Legislative body, its work, and the legislative process in general.

A well-run committee meeting attended by all, or most, of the committee members will leave a vastly different impression on the public than a disorganized, sparsely attended hearing.

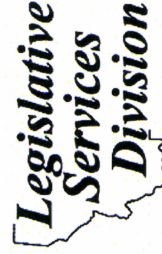
Benefits of Committees to Committee Members

As a legislator and committee member, you have the opportunity to:

- develop expertise in a particular field and oversee the state agencies associated with those issues;
- plan and participate in a forum that evaluates, refines, and creates legislative policy;
- allow your constituents access to critical legislative policy decisions; and
- promote governmental accountability.

For more information, please contact the Legislative Services Division:

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Guidelines for Being an Effective Committee Member



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Overview

During each Legislative Session, much of your day is spent in committee, considering, amending, and approving or rejecting legislation in various issue areas. You come here with expertise in a subject, and you develop even more expertise during your time here. You use that knowledge to vet bills in committee for the full House or Senate.

This brochure provides general information about the benefits and responsibilities of committee membership in the Montana Legislature. It is not a comprehensive digest of statutes, rules, or other applicable provisions. Legislators are advised to consult the actual laws and rules to determine specific questions. This is easily done using the indexes that are published with the Montana Code Annotated (MCA) and the *Rules of the Montana Legislature*.

Committees also develop rules of procedure that outline how a committee will conduct its business. The rules are posted and made available at committee meetings. This practice helps everyone involved in the meetings to make the best use of their time and to facilitate participation in the process.

To Be An Effective Committee Member

- In a nutshell . . . be engaged and participate. Committee members devote time and effort to understanding the issues, evaluating the information presented, and formulating sound recommendations. In fulfilling this role:
- know the committee rules, for example, the chair decides points of order, and committee protocols, like ask questions through the presiding officer and speak into the microphone;
 - provide amendments in advance to staff for proper drafting;
 - show up for committee meetings and pay attention to the work of the committee. Colleagues who are not on the committee often rely on committee members to explain a bill;
 - avoid use of a computer/cell phone for work that does not appear to be related to the bill being heard by the committee; let the presiding officer or the minority vice presiding officer know if you are unable to attend and provide a written proxy for bills and amendments; and get to know your staffer and how they are able to assist you.

Your Rights as a Committee Member

Montana law provides that a "legislator has a responsibility to the legislator's constituents to participate in all matters as required in the rules of the legislature". Participation hinges upon understanding the bills, amendments, and motions before a committee. If you are unclear about a bill or a motion, seek clarification. After hearing from the public, members may ask questions of those who testified. During executive action, members may ask questions of one another, of staff, and, at the committee's discretion, of others.

A presiding officer provides the best experience for committee members by controlling the hearing process to ensure hearings are conducted fairly and in a manner that demonstrates respect for members. Although the presiding officer is responsible for the efficient management of the committee, it is the committee, as a whole, that is ultimately responsible for the conduct of committee work.

Decisions by the presiding officer are, as in the body of each respective house, subject to modification or reversal by a majority of a quorum of the members of the committee.